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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 8 (1) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

Reports of States parties due in 2013

Saudi Arabia*

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Introduction

1. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is hereby submitting its first report under article 8 (1) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which covers the period 2011-2015. Saudi Arabia acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 11 September 1995. It acceded to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict on 18 Rajab A.H. 1431 (30 June A.D. 2010) and deposited the instrument of accession on 19 June 2011. Also on 18 Rajab A.H. 1431 (30 June A.D. 2010), it acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The actions of Saudi Arabia in this regard are consistent with recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child after considering the second periodic report of Saudi Arabia under the Convention in 2006. Saudi Arabia is also a party to many other regional and international human rights instruments as will be explained in more detail later in this report.

2. The combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia under the Convention were submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013 and are due to be considered during the Committee's seventy-third session scheduled to be held from 13 to 30 September 2016. Saudi Arabia would like to confirm that it fulfils its obligations to protect and care for children in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights standards.

3. Saudi Arabia has seen important developments in a number of human rights-related fields. Despite the fact that the country is located in what is currently one of the most turbulent regions of the world, it has enjoyed political and social stability thanks to its adherence to religious and cultural values, its even-handed policies, its contributions to maintaining international peace and security, and its handling of regional and international crises. Its actions are consistent with the principles set forth in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations; in fact, Saudi Arabia is a founding member of the United Nations, having joined the organization on 27 October 1945.

4. The leading position and exalted status that Saudi Arabia enjoys within the Islamic world has enabled the country to play an important role in promoting peace and stability, and in defending human rights in the region. This it does, not just by promoting political efforts and initiatives aimed at achieving peace and stability, but also by allocating considerable financial resources to reduce the humanitarian aid burden of States suffering armed conflicts. In particular, Saudi Arabia has been increasingly concerned to relieve the suffering of children and families in conflict-riven States.

5. At a national level, Saudi Arabia has taken steps to fulfil its obligations under the Optional Protocol, including legislative, administrative and procedural measures and the launch of training programmes, as will be explained in some detail in this report. Adequately protecting and caring for all children in Saudi Arabia still poses certain challenges, including improving the qualifications of persons who work with children and increasing the capacity of available resources. The most significant efforts being made to that end will be reflected in this report. It should be noted that Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing comprehensive developments in the judicial and legislative field, both in general and in relation to children in particular. It has conducted a series of judicial reforms and legislative amendments and the report will illustrate the efforts made to harmonize national law with the Optional Protocol.

6. Despite the progress that has been made in the care and protection of children, a number of challenges still remain. These include, by way of example, protecting children from the negative consequences of the turbulent political situation in the region and the armed conflicts in a number of neighbouring States, and safeguarding them from inappropriate cultural content circulating in both traditional and new media.

7. The report will explain how the approach Saudi Arabia takes to protecting children is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. It will describe legislation and policies aimed at upholding children's rights, as well as the financial and technical resources allocated to child-support programmes and services, and

to children's institutions to help them carry out their duties and train their staff. It will also provide information about cooperation and interaction with international and regional organizations and civil society groups.

I. General measures of implementation

(a) Preparation of the report

8. The National Commission for Childhood was given responsibility for preparing the first report of Saudi Arabia on the measures taken to give effect to the Optional Protocol. A national oversight committee was set up under the presidency of the National Commission with members representing the government ministries and institutions most closely associated with the implementation of the Optional Protocol. They are: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the National Guard, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Human Rights Commission, the General Authority for Statistics, the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Ministry of Labour.

9. The committee produced the first draft of the report. That draft was then referred to the standing committee, which was created under High-level Order No. 13084 of 27 Rabi' I A.H. 1436 (18 January 2015) and is responsible for preparing all reports under the human rights treaties to which Saudi Arabia is a party. The creation of the standing committee is an indication of the importance Saudi Arabia gives to its reporting obligations. Apart from being an obligation under the treaties, reporting provides a good opportunity and an effective way to improve the human rights situation in States parties. The standing committee, which is made up of representatives from relevant government departments, has a broad remit that enables it to draft and submit the reports effectively and within the established deadlines.

10. During the preparation of the report government departments, as well as experts and researchers in the field of child welfare were all widely consulted. This approach added value as, over and above the process of merely drafting the report, it made institutions and individuals aware of principles and concepts related to the rights of children, as enshrined in the Optional Protocol. As part of this inclusive approach, the drafting of the report included one very important stage, which was considered an essential part of its preparation and completion: the draft was sent to all relevant government departments and to a number of experts and professionals, who were asked to express their views thereon. On the one hand, this had the important consequence of enriching the contents of the report; on the other, it also served to arouse those parties' interest in and awareness of the provisions of the Optional Protocol. Account was also taken of the general guidelines regarding the form and content of initial reports, as adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and it is important to note that the present report should be read in conjunction with the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(b) The legal status of the Optional Protocol in domestic law

11. Any international or regional instrument to which Saudi Arabia accedes, or which it has ratified, is considered to be part of domestic law and imposes the same level of legal obligation as national legislation. This is because the legal mechanism whereby laws are passed in Saudi Arabia is the same whereby the country accedes to international instruments and treaties. According to article 70 of the Basic Law of Governance, "laws, international agreements, treaties and concessions shall be approved and amended by Royal Decree". Saudi Arabia also abides by the provisions of such instruments and treaties on the basis of the well-established sharia principle concerning fealty to one's word for, as

Almighty God has said, "O you who have believed, fulfil [all] contracts".[1] Therefore, the provisions of the Optional Protocol may be invoked before domestic courts.

12. Once Saudi Arabia had acceded to the Optional Protocol, the text was published in the Official Gazette "Umm al-Qura", edition No. 4318 dated 13 August 2010, and it came into force. Article 11 (1) of the procedures for concluding international treaties states that, when a treaty comes into force, the competent bodies must take the steps necessary to implement it so as to ensure that all the country's obligations arising from the treaty are duly fulfilled. To that end, the National Commission for Childhood began examining domestic laws to determine to what extent they were consistent with the Optional Protocol. The Commission also drew the attention of competent government departments to the Optional Protocol in order for them to implement such of its provisions as concerned them and to inform the secretariat of the Commission on the steps they had taken in that regard. Furthermore, the Optional Protocol was incorporated into the international and regional standards used as a reference by the Human Rights Commission in carrying out its functions under article 5 of its statutes. In fact, the Human Rights Commission monitors how government departments apply the international human rights instruments to which Saudi Arabia has acceded and ensures that they are taking the measures necessary to implement them.

(c) Implementation of the Optional Protocol throughout Saudi Arabia

13. The Optional Protocol is applied in all parts of Saudi Arabia and to everyone who is subject to the country's juridical jurisdiction, vis-à-vis both national law and obligations under international law.

(d) Dissemination of the Optional Protocol and training

14. In addition to other steps taken to raise awareness about the Optional Protocol, which will be detailed later in the present report, a raft of official measures has been introduced to disseminate a knowledge of the text. They include the following:

- The text of the Optional Protocol was published in the Official Gazette "Umm al-Qura", edition No. 4318 dated 3 Ramadan A.H. 1431 (13 August A.D. 2010);
- Royal Decree No. 39 dated 18 Rajab A.H. 1431 (30 June A.D. 2010) was sent to all ministries and departments involved in the implementation of the Optional Protocol;
- The National Commission for Childhood began examining domestic laws to determine to what extent they were consistent with the Optional Protocol, and distributing copies of the text to competent departments in order for them to implement such of its provisions as concerned them and to inform the secretariat of the Commission on the steps they had taken in that regard;
- The second phase of the Human Rights Culture Dissemination Programme, established by High-level Order No. 8628/ M B, dated 24 Shawwal A.H. 1430 (13 October A.D. 2009), has been implemented. A number of government departments take part in the programme, each having drafted its own plan based on a number of key principles: the plan must contribute to the fulfilment of the country's commitments under the treaties to which it is party, including the Optional Protocol; it must be relevant to problems of human rights violations and erroneous practices; and it must focus directly on human rights content and standards. These plans will pave the way for a comprehensive national plan for disseminating a culture of human rights over the widest possible range;
- The Human Rights Commission has convened a number of seminars and workshops including a workshop for judges, members of the Public Investigation and Prosecution Department (Public Prosecutor) and lawyers held in various cities across the country in 2011 and 2012, and a special workshop on international human

[1] Surah 5, verse 1.

rights conventions in 2010. Numerous articles have appeared in the media on the subject of children's rights and instructional booklets and brochures have been published. The Commission also participates regularly in exhibitions, such as book fairs and the Janadriyah Heritage and Culture Festival, and it observes international days such as Human Rights Day;

- The Public Authority for Sport continues to use sporting events and activities as a way to educate young people about human rights. At races, tournaments and other sporting events, Koranic verses, Hadiths and other inspiring messages that encourage the protection and promotion of human rights, including the rights of children, are projected on stadium screens or printed on posters;

- A national human rights education committee, made up of ten government agencies, has adopted a national human rights education plan and published a human rights teaching guide for all institutions, schools and universities. Furthermore, the committee has published a guide on school curricula as the matrix of human rights and conducted surveys to ascertain the status of human rights within schools. In addition, training programmes have been developed for human rights educators while international human rights law and international humanitarian law have been incorporated into advanced studies programmes.

(e) Departments involved in the implementation of the Optional Protocol

15. Responsibility for implementing the Optional Protocol falls upon a number of government bodies including the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the National Guard, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture and Information. The Human Rights Commission has the task of following up and verifying that those bodies have taken the steps necessary to implement the Optional Protocol, as well as other international human rights instruments to which Saudi Arabia is a party. The Commission is also responsible for uncovering any violations of those instruments, reviewing current laws and proposing amendments in line with due legal procedure. In its work to ensure liaison and coordination, and to monitor the implementation of international treaties, the Human Rights Commission is assisted by a number of other bodies including the National Commission for Childhood and the National Society for Human Rights, as will be explained later. Many government bodies, including the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence, have set up human rights departments which have the task of achieving the objectives of the international human rights treaties to which Saudi Arabia is a party, including the Optional Protocol, and raising awareness among relevant agencies.

16. The National Commission for Childhood has a number of different mechanisms via which it seeks to liaise with and coordinate the efforts of the ministries involved in giving effect to the Optional Protocol. It also gives the ministries advice from a childhood-related perspective on bills, decrees and other legal and technical matters. Efforts and resources are also mobilized indirectly by other relevant actors such as media institutions and civil society.

17. The National Commission for Childhood was re-established in A.H. 1426 (A.D. 2005) and its material and human resources were boosted in A.H. 1430 (A.D. 2009) in order to enable it to coordinate the activities of the various sectors involved in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. The capacity of the National Commission has recently been further reinforced with professional staff specializing in various childhood-related issues, as a way of promoting liaison and coordination and encouraging partnerships with government departments, civil society institutions and international and regional organizations.

18. A number of programmes have been developed to promote coordination between government departments and national institutions whose activities have a bearing on childhood. They include a joint programme between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the National Commission for Childhood, which has been supported by the State to the amount of US$ 500,000 per year since 2007. The programme aims to bring together all the institutions that are involved with childhood and to coordinate between all

the partners that operate in that field. The joint project has given rise to a number of programmes, which were explained in detail in the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(f) National human rights institutions

19. Since Saudi Arabia believes that civil society is a fundamental partner in the protection and promotion of human rights, it has provided support for civil society institutions and associations, in particular those that work to promote and protect human rights, generally or specifically. Evidence of this is to be found in the financial support provided to such groups and in the fact that the State enables them to operate independently and promotes their activities through training and national capacity-building programmes. In 2012 Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding on technical cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in order to achieve a number of important objectives including that of organizing human rights seminars and training courses. There are more than 650 associations/institutions in Saudi Arabia specializing in human rights, and the total amount of financial support given to them by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development during 2014 amounted to around 535 million Saudi riyals (SRI), in other words about US$ 142.8 million.

20. The Civil Associations and Organizations Act was issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/8 of 19 Safar A.H. 1437 (1 December A.D. 2015) with the aim of strengthening, regulating and protecting the work of civil society, contributing to national development, increasing citizen participation in the management and development of the community, promoting voluntary work among individuals and fostering social solidarity. The Act simplifies procedures by making it possible for 10 persons to set up an association — rather than 20, which was the previous minimum requirement — and obtain licences within 60 days of completing the application form. It also allows civil society institutions and public interest associations, with the approval of the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, to receive voluntary contributions. The Act thus promotes the activities of civil society institutions and prevents them being abused for criminal purposes, particularly terrorist offences, exploitation of children, hate crimes or racial discrimination.

National Society for Human Rights

21. The National Society for Human Rights is a national institution, which was established in 2004 and has no links to any government agency. It enjoys complete independence in all its affairs and has a mandate to protect, promote and defend the human rights of citizens, residents and visitors. It works in collaboration with government departments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations to achieve the goals for which it was established, in accordance with its statutes. Its main duties are:

- To ensure that human rights-related elements of the Basic Law of Governance and of domestic laws are duly implemented;
- To ensure that the country fulfils its human rights obligations in accordance with international and regional human rights standards;
- To receive complaints and follow these up with the competent authorities, and to verify cases of human rights violations.

22. The National Society for Human Rights is made up of academics and specialists in various human rights-related field, both men and women. The Society publishes annual reports on the human rights situation in the country.

II. Prevention

(a) Recruitment

23. There is no law in Saudi Arabia that allows for compulsory or voluntary recruitment into the armed forces. The laws regulating entry into combat sectors depend upon the needs of those sectors, in accordance with current military laws, which are consistent with the obligations of Saudi Arabia under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Saudi military pays great heed to the fundamental principles of children's rights and seek to ensure that its activities and procedures remain consistent with the Convention and its Optional Protocol as regards the involvement of children in the armed forces, particularly with regard to not involving children in combat sectors. In accordance with the relevant laws, the armed forces regulate entry into all combat sectors in accordance with procedures that do not infringe the Convention or its Optional Protocol.

(b) Legislative and administrative measures

24. In addition to the measures mentioned above, Saudi legislators have taken other steps to prevent the involvement of children in armed conflicts. According to article 4 of the Enlistment Act, promulgated pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/9 of 24 Rabi' I A.H. 1397 (15 March A.D. 1977), "a candidate for military service must not be less than 17 years of age", while article 6 of the same Act states that "the individual shall remain on probation for one year from the date of his appointment". Furthermore, article 4 of the Officers Act, also promulgated pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/9 of 24 Rabi' I A.H. 1397 (15 March A.D. 1977), states that an officer must "be at least 19 years of age". Article 8 of the Child Protection Act, promulgated by Royal Decree No. M/14 on 3 Safar A.H. 1436 (25 November 2014), prohibits the employment of children "in activities that may harm their integrity or their physical or moral health, or their involvement in military activities or armed conflict". It should also be pointed out that article 1 of that Act defines children as anyone who has not reached the age of 18. Thus it can be said that the laws of Saudi Arabia mesh together to ensure that children are not involved in armed conflicts or harmful activities, and to give effect to the principle of the best interests of the child.

25. On 30 Jumada I A.H. 1435 (31 March A.D. 2014), the Council of Ministers approved an amendment to article 15 of the Military Colleges Act, which defines the acceptance criteria for being admitted to a military college. According to the new amendment, only university graduates and persons holding a high-school leaving certificate may be admitted, and candidates must have completed the tests prescribed by the National Centre for Assessment and Evaluation. Furthermore, high-school graduates must not be less than 17 years of age at the beginning of the academic year, as per their national identity document. Candidates also have to pass the medical examination, the personal interview, the comprehensive acceptance test and the physical fitness test.

26. It should be noted, moreover, that, under article 31 of the Military Colleges Act, graduating from military college and qualifying for any kind of military occupation requires three years of regular study for high-school graduates. This means that military-college graduates are, in any case, not less than 20 years of age. Additionally, according to articles 19 and 30 of the Act, students enrolled in military colleges in Saudi Arabia are not classified as members of the armed forces — and do not, therefore, enjoy any privileges or shoulder any combat or field responsibilities — until they have graduated. Nor can they be summoned for service if hostilities happen to break out.

27. As these legal provisions and administrative conditions clearly show, persons under the age of 18 cannot be involved in armed conflict as part of the Saudi armed forces. The Acts mentioned above require candidates to have at least a high-school leaving certificate, which takes 12 years of study to acquire, beginning from the age of 6 which is the age primary education begins. Candidates must also have passed a barrage of tests before being admitted to military college in the year following their graduation from high school. This

means that they are always over 18 before effectively entering on any activities in the military or the armed forces.

(c) Verification of age at recruitment

28. The authorities undertake to verify that conditions relating to the age of candidates for military service are duly fulfilled by imposing a requirement to submit adequate documentation, such as the original of a birth certificate or a national identity document, and to provide medical reports establishing that candidates meet the levels required for the military profession for which they are applying. Under domestic law, including the Enlistment Act and the Officers Act, the recruitment age may not be lowered under any circumstances, however exceptional or critical. The requirement is that documentary evidence be provided before accepting an application. Article 4 of the Enlistment Act highlights the importance of verifying the age of candidates for military service by sending them "before a medical committee to estimate their age if there is a discrepancy between the age given on the birth certificate or identity document and the candidate's bodily development. The decision of the committee in that regard is final". The provision of this Act are applied to all sectors of the military in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the National Commission for Childhood, in its examination of domestic laws and relevant military procedures, has proposed further conditions aimed at preventing members of the armed forces under the age of 18 from participating directly or indirectly in combat operations.

(d) Safeguards to ensure that recruitment is genuinely voluntary

29. Entry to the armed forces of Saudi Arabia is directly supervised by recruitment officers, in order to guarantee that only persons voluntarily wishing to enlist are admitted to military service. National military institutions are also careful to ensure that enlistment in the armed forces is voluntary and that persons wishing to enlist are given all the information they need about the duties that military service entails. Those institutions advertise among potential recruits then meet with candidates, asking them why they wish to join up and explaining the nature of military duties. The government departments responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Optional Protocol — including the Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Childhood — work to ensure that there is no compulsory recruitment. Civil society organizations also play an important role in that connection, chief among them the National Society for Human Rights.

(e) Schools and colleges

30. Saudi Arabia believes that the right of children to education embraces their right to receive a comprehensive education; in other words, one that develops their capacities and ensures their all-round development, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. This also implies the non-militarization of the schools that children attend, and that is why there are no schools in Saudi Arabia that direct children towards or prepare them for military careers. Nor are there any currently any military institutions that provide or supervise any kind of general education for children between the elementary level (6-year olds) and the secondary level (18-year olds).

(f) Armed groups

31. There are no armed groups whatsoever in Saudi Arabia and domestic law forbids the formation of such groups outside the framework of the country's own armed forces. The law also forbids citizens — both children and adults — from joining such groups or participating in armed combat inside or outside the country, as will be explained in more detail later. Recently, Royal Order No. M/44, dated 3 Rabi' II A.H. 1435 (3 February A.D. 2014), has introduced a penalty of between 3 and 20 years' imprisonment for anyone found criminally responsible of having participated in combat operations outside Saudi Arabia, for whatever reason.

(g) Cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross

Saudi Red Crescent Authority

32. Saudi Arabia cooperates with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) through the Saudi Red Crescent Authority, which provides ambulance coverage and emergency medical services to citizens and residents in both ordinary and crisis situations. The Authority also participates, both inside and outside the country, in relief efforts for civilian and military victims of situations defined in the Geneva Conventions. Furthermore, the Saudi Red Crescent Authority supervises the delivery of Saudi aid to countries in need. Recently, in 2014, this included the construction of 600 housing units and health centres in the state of Al-Jazirah in the Sudan. In addition, the Authority seeks to raise awareness about refugees and each year it organizes events to mark World Refugee Day. Most recently, in Riyadh on 20 June 2014, the Authority supervised activities for World Refugee Day, which had been organized by the office of the Regional Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Using the media and educational tools, those activities sought to draw public attention to World Refugee Day and to highlight the problems in displaced persons camps in countries affected by war. This was accompanied by a photo exhibition about refugees around the world, their sufferings and their need to be assisted and either resettled or returned to their countries of origin.

33. The Saudi Red Crescent Authority maintains fruitful ties and fosters cooperation with relevant United Nations organizations such as UNHCR and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). It coordinates and cooperates with those bodies in the delivery of aid to countries affected by war and armed conflicts around the world. This is in addition to bilateral cooperation on training programmes, exchange of expertise, and joint coordination mechanisms. In 2014, the Authority signed a memorandum of cooperation with UNHCR the aim of which is to develop joint training programmes and to improve the performance of the Saudi Red Crescent Authority in its delivery of humanitarian assistance.

(h) Children at risk

34. Saudi Arabia has consistently sought to provide comprehensive care, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, by introducing appropriate regulations and legislation and implementing care plans and programmes for people with special needs. This has involved both the public and private sectors. A number of laws and regulations, including the Child Protection Act, aim to ensure the environmental security of children and guard them against environmental hazards. Pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/56, dated 11 Jumada II A.H. 1428 (26 June 2007), Saudi Arabia acceded to the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, while pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/37, dated 18 Jumada II A.H. 1434 (28 April 2013), it ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). The Anti-Human Trafficking Act was approved by Royal Decree No. M/40, dated 21 Rajab A.H. 1430 (14 July 2009) and, in the same month, the Council of Ministers set up a governmental anti-human trafficking committee to implement the Act. The State has also taken steps to increase budget allocations for children most in need. The allocations are intended to cover programmes and other measures for the protection of children, with a particular emphasis on social care and protection. They include initiatives to tackle poverty and its negative implications for a family's ability to satisfy children's right to life, development and education or to provide for basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, schooling and literacy. The State has taken effective measures to eradicate poverty at all levels, to which end it drafted the National Social Development Strategy, which has been adopted by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

35. In line with the Strategy, substantial additional financial resources are allocated to provide a wide variety of welfare services and social and economic support to the poor and groups with special needs, through programmes run by the Ministry of Labour and Social

Development and civil society organizations. The most important steps taken by the State in that regard include the following:

- Introducing the Supplementary Support Programme to bridge the gap between real income (of families, individuals and the very poor) and the poverty line, in line with official studies on the varying poverty lines in Saudi Arabia. The support given amounts to around SRI 264 million (US$ 70 million) annually;
- Supporting the Social Welfare Fund to the amount of SRI 300 million (US$ 80 million) annually as a way of curbing poverty;
- Increasing allocations for orphans, persons in special circumstances and others to the amount of SRI 82 million (US$ 21.8 million) annually. The sums cover benefits for foster families, school benefits, end-of-custody payments, and payments for persons who reside in orphanages;
- Establishing an "emergency assistance" programme for indigent families who are in critical emergency situations that lead to increased suffering and problems, such as the death, imprisonment or illness of a breadwinner, illness of children, fire in the home, natural disaster, etc.;
- Increasing allocations to charitable organizations from SRI 100 million (US$ 26.6 million) to SRI 450 million (or US$ 120 million) annually;
- Increasing the upper limit for social security pensions to families from SRI 16,000 (US$ 4,000) to SRI 58,000 (US$ 15,000) annually. This resulted in an increase in social security allowances in A.H. 1430-1431 (A.D. 2009-2010) to SRI 13 billion (US$ 3.4 billion).

36. The State has also undertakes to provide direct social care to the needy through a range of specialized institutions under the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. Among the things these institutions offer are services for people with disabilities that benefit 205,445 individuals with physical, sensory, mental and mobility issues. A total of SRI 2 billion (US$ 533.3 million) was allocated to those categories in the year A.H. 1431 (A.D. 2009). Juvenile welfare and surveillance services benefited 15,893 users in the period A.H. 1430-1431 (A.D. 2009-2010). Foster homes, social education homes for girls, social education homes for boys, institutions for the care of paralyzed children, and social welfare homes for the elderly benefited a total of 2,056 individuals in the period A.H. 1430-1431 (A.D. 2009-2010). Moreover, Council of Ministers Decision No. 237, dated 23 Sha'ban A.H. 1427 (15 October A.D. 2006), approved an increase in benefits to orphans, persons in special circumstances and others, including benefits for foster families, school benefits, end-of-custody payments, marriage allowances and payments for persons who reside in orphanages.

37. Social development centres and their committees, which are distributed throughout the country, contribute to the State's efforts to channel larger amounts to programmes for children most in need. Moreover, as part of the National Social Development Strategy, the Takaful Foundation was recently established with a budget of SRI 500 million (US$ 133.3 million). The work of the Foundation focuses on the welfare of students most in need and those whose families are facing difficult economic, social or health circumstances, in more than 30,000 State-run and private schools for boys and girls up and down the country. The aim is to help them in their studies and to mitigate the effects of poverty. Takaful Foundation beneficiaries are identified by committees, which are set up in each school and may apply to local residents for help in identifying students in need. The provision of financial or in-kind assistance by the Takaful Foundation to students does not affect any other aid they or their families might already receive. The support budget is estimated at SRI 400 million (US$ 106.6 million), which is distributed to the following programmes: 220,000 students receive school benefits; 60,000 are given meals; 6,000 are provided with uniforms; and 7,000 benefit from the programme to encourage outstanding students. In its activities, the Foundation relies on the help of 70,000 volunteers in schools and educational districts around the country. More details about the mission and programmes of the Takaful Foundation are available at: takaful.moe.gov.sa. For further information, please consult the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia under the Convention on the

Rights of the Child, which includes a complete exposé of the efforts made by the State to help vulnerable children through legislation, economic support and other programmes.

Measures to increase awareness about the Optional Protocol and to provide appropriate training

38. In addition to what has already been stated in this report, the National Commission for Childhood has sought to find innovative ways, using effective and appropriate means, to develop social awareness-raising programmes about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. To that end it has cooperated with a number of partners such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and Information, the National Family Safety Programme, the King Abdulaziz Public Library, the Human Rights Commission, the National Society for Human Rights and UNICEF.

39. This participatory approach has resulted in a wider and more effective knowledge of the Convention and its Optional Protocols among members of society. Joint programmes have borne fruit such as festivals and exhibitions as well as training workshops, lectures and a number of publications. Some of these are simplified versions of the Convention and its Optional Protocols designed to be read by children, others are manuals for professionals or families. They have been distributed throughout the country to schools, families and children's centres. In addition to the information provided to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013 in the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia under the Convention, other measures taken to raise awareness about the Optional Protocol include:

- The National Commission for Childhood has organized a series of workshops to raise awareness among persons working with children and persons responsible for implementing international treaties, and to develop their report-writing skills on child-related issues. The last such workshop was held in 2014;
- The Ministry of Education seeks to make human rights in general, and children's rights in particular, part of school curricula at all levels throughout Saudi Arabia. It also organizes a raft of activities for students inside schools, including sporting, cultural, theatrical and scouting activities, in order to make the Convention on the Rights of the Child more widely known. For example, plays are produced that are aimed at giving children a better awareness of their own rights while kindergartens in the country annually celebrate Universal Children's Day, most recently on 20 November 2014;
- A second collection of special children's stories, five in all, was produced in 2014. The stories are designed to make children aware of their rights within the general theoretical framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. This project is an initiative on the part of the National Commission for Childhood in collaboration with the King Abdulaziz Public Library and UNICEF. The National Commission for Childhood has printed 27,970 copies of the collection, which have been distributed to children free of charge via the King Abdulaziz Public Library and the Commission itself. It may be recalled that 65,000 copies of the first collection, also containing five stories, were printed and distributed to public and school libraries, as described in the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia under the Convention;
- For five years, the Ministry of Culture and Information has been regularly organizing the annual Children's Festival. The event lasts three days and involves theatre performances, seminars, lectures and an accompanying exhibition to disseminate awareness about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. Leaflets and other printed material regarding children's rights are distributed to visitors, whose numbers are in excess of 5,000, both children and adults.
- Each year, the Saudi Red Crescent Authority organizes activities to mark World Refugee Day. The most recent event took place in Riyadh on 20 June 2014, as mentioned earlier;

- The National Human Rights Association strives to make people more aware of children's rights, also by publishing booklets such as "The Rights Convention – The Rights of the Child in Islam" and a human rights magazine entitled "My Rights" that has the logo: "Know Your Rights and Colour Them". The purpose of the magazine is to teach children about their rights through drawing, colouring, expressive images, educational maxims and posters to draw children's attention and improve their knowledge of their rights. The Association also runs courses and awareness-raising programmes for children and their parents in schools, as well as courses and workshops to spread the culture of children's rights. For example, it has organized a seminar on the protection of children from violence, a two-day awareness-raising campaign on children's rights called "Yes to Protection … No to Exploitation" and a three-week children's rights training course for 475 student counsellors;
- The Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the National Guard and the Ministry of the Interior have introduced human rights principles and child rights principles into their military colleges and educational institutions. The curricula of those institutions now include human rights decrees and material relevant to international humanitarian law (see the guide to the King Fahd Security College at www.kfsc.edu.sa).

40. In the context of the memorandum of cooperation that Saudi Arabia signed with OHCHR in 2012, the Human Rights Commission organizes a series of human rights training programmes, both inside and outside the country. This is in addition to its own programme of educational activities. The purpose of the memorandum of cooperation is to develop the capacities of persons who work in the field of international human rights law, particularly with regard to United Nations mechanisms and international organizations; to set up and run specialized human rights training programmes, both inside and outside the country; to draft manuals in line with relevant international standards for persons who operate in the human rights sector; and to organize seminars, conferences, courses and workshops on human rights for the staff of relevant government departments and of civil society associations in Saudi Arabia. In order to give effect to the memorandum, the first training programme on United Nations human rights mechanisms was held in Riyadh at the beginning of 2014. The programme, which was run by five United Nations experts and attended by 150 staff from government departments and civil society organizations, aimed to develop the country's capacity to comprehend international human rights mechanisms, to prepare its initial reports on human rights treaties and present them to the relevant United Nations treaty bodies. Some of the activities that have taken place in the context of the memorandum of understanding are listed below:

Title of the course or seminar	*Date*	*Target groups*
Successful international experiences in combating human trafficking	Mar. 2014	Civil servants
The work of international human rights protection mechanisms	Mar. 2014	Civil servants, lawyers human rights defenders
Training the trainer in human rights 1	Dec. 2014	Civil servants, lawyers human rights defenders
Training the trainer in human rights 2	Feb. 2015	Civil servants, lawyers human rights defenders
Informative seminar on the Convention on the Rights of the Child	Oct. 2015	General public

Measures to disseminate a culture of peace and peaceful coexistence

41. The State authorities have made strenuous efforts to promote a culture of peace and peaceful coexistence, and to encourage religious tolerance and dialogue in society, in a manner consistent with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its

Optional Protocols. The King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue is an independent body that aims to promote intellectual dialogue between members of the community, groups and institutions, and to consolidate and disseminate a culture of peace, as well as values such as moderation, tolerance, and coexistence, in order to achieve justice, equality and freedom of expression in society. It does this by involving various academic and religious groups in mechanisms to promote dialogue. The Centre has taken a number of important steps by organizing meetings and training courses via which it has introduced some 3,140 trainers to its education, family and heritage programmes, as well as its programmes for disseminating a culture of dialogue. In their turn, those trainers have trained more than 1 million citizens in the programmes. Further details are available on the website of the King Abdulaziz Centre: www.kacnd.org. The most significant of the programmes are listed below:

- *Travel programme*: This aims to achieve understanding between peoples through the comprehension and acceptance of other cultures, the promotion of shared principles, the avoidance of conflict, and respect for the culture of individuals and the civilization of peoples. It includes regular meetings between Saudi students and their peers from international schools in the country. So far 26 dialogues of this kind have been held. The programme is part of an integrated system to encourage participation of groups of young people in forums and conferences abroad that deal with dialogue and cultural exchange. For example, some young people from Saudi Arabia went to the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York to discuss youth issues. Others participated in the Arab Youth Parliament in Cairo in November 2008, the Islamic World Youth Forum organized by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in Tunis in 2009, and the first Arab-European Young Leaders Conference in Austria in 2009. Moreover, the Centre held a well-attended youth and volunteer international forum in 2014;

- *Bayader volunteer programme*: Bayader is a group of youthful volunteers who are interested in spreading the values of moderation, tolerance and dialogue among other young people. The programme is aimed at students of both sexes in general or higher education, parents and mosque groups. One of its most prominent projects has been the Caravan of Dialogue, which has reached out to villages in 11 provinces in governorates of the Riyadh region. Around 3,000 school and university students and their parents have benefited from this initiative and work is continuing in order to extend the initiative to villages and governorates in the rest of the country;

- *Bridges Programme*: This aims to promote respect for the religions and cultures of expatriates in Saudi Arabia and to encourage citizens to interact with them in a spirit of civilized and constructive dialogue. Through this programme, more than 40 male and female trainers have been awarded cultural dialogue certificates, and a set of training packages for the dissemination of a culture of tolerance has been developed. At the same time, a series of publications for children and young people between the ages of 6 and 15 has been produced with titles such as: "We are the children of the planet"; "A bridge between two continents"; "You and I" (a manual for parents and educators on the development of intercultural dialogue); and a novel, "Coloured steps: Around the World in Forty-Five Minutes";

- *Bulletins on dialogue series*: The Centre has also compiled and published a series of small booklets on dialogue. Fourteen such booklets have been published, each containing between 40 and 70 pages and aimed primarily at young people. The Centre has also issued a varied collection of short stories with the title "Fun and meaningful dialogue" aimed at children between the ages of 5 and 16. For more details on this initiative, please consult the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia under the Convention;

- *Summer camp — We are the children of the planet*: The aim of this initiative is to familiarize children between the ages of 5 and 12 with other cultures and civilizations. During 2014, the Centre ran two camps which were attended by 60 boys and girls and supervised by childcare specialists.

42. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Da'wah and Guidance instructs preachers and imams to encourage tolerance and moderation in their sermons from the pulpit, in the lessons they hold in mosques and in other relevant activities.

Promoting a culture of peace and human rights through school curricula

43. Saudi Arabia has taken steps to ensure that the goals and methods of education remain consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. To that end, various plans, programmes and educational curricula have been introduced, including the following:

- Human rights culture and human rights concepts have been integrated into school curricula as part of the King Abdullah Project for the Development of General Education (Tatweer). The aim is to ensure that teachers are able to comprehend the human rights system, understand human rights and duties and interact with the community and the environment in accordance therewith;
- Saudi Arabia is participating in the drafting of the Arab Plan for Human Rights Education. The Plan seeks to integrate human rights into the education system at all stages, provide human rights education training for staff, create a human rights-friendly educational environment and expand community participation in the dissemination of a human rights culture etc.
- The planning and development agency in the Ministry of Education is drafting a plan that aims to ensure that the values, principles and concepts of human rights are duly integrated into schools. Other goals of the plan are to train school staff in human rights culture and produce reference manuals and educational media on how to include the values and concepts of human rights in the curricula;
- A ministerial coordinating committee on girls' education has been established. In coordination with the National Human Rights Association, it seeks to promote an understanding of human rights among female students and to combat violence;
- Exhibitions have been organized in schools to teach children and adolescents about the damaging consequences of participating in armed conflicts and to help them avoid being recruited or involved in such conflicts. The exhibitions, which involve a number of ministries, are part of an initiative by His Majesty the King;
- In order to promote a rights-based culture and, as a consequence, protect the rights of children, human rights law has been incorporated into advanced studies programmes and is already being taught at a number of universities in Saudi Arabia, as explained earlier.

Messengers of Peace scouting initiative

44. The Saudi Arabian Scouts Association is involved in a number of initiatives to promote a culture of peace. For example, the Association hosted 1,500 scouts and venturer scouts from 85 countries at its first peace camp, held in the city of Jubail in 2006 under the slogan "Together for Peace". The second peace camp was held in Jeddah in 2011. The Association also hosted the World Scouting Fair for Peace in 2008. The aim of the camps and the fairs was to make participants better aware of other cultures, nationalities and beliefs and to inculcate them with the values and principles of peace. Furthermore, in 2009 Saudi Arabia gave considerable financial support to the world scouting fund to promote peace programmes, train scouting leaders and organize activities in poor countries. In 2011, it gave additional support to the amount of US$ 17 million which helped the Association meet the challenges involved in launching the Messengers of Peace initiative.

45. The communications media play an important role by raising awareness among members of society — including children — about the dangers of armed conflict and its damaging effects on society, particularly the young. The media also help to propagate a culture of peace and peaceful coexistence and to encourage religious tolerance in society, in line with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. This was the conclusion reached by a study carried out by the National Commission for Childhood entitled "The role of the Saudi press in promoting childhood".

The study involved a daily analysis of the contents of five Saudi newspapers over a period of one full year in order to see to what extent the press dealt with children's issues, the methodologies and stereotypes employed, the extent to which it abided by a media code of ethics and the effect all those things had on the way it promoted childhood. In fact, the study highlighted the effective role that Saudi media institutions play by disseminating community awareness about questions affecting children, garnering support to address those issues and making society aware of the dangers children face both inside and outside Saudi Arabia. Apart from those positive findings, the study also concluded that Saudi media institutions needed to make greater efforts to spread awareness about the pressing issues facing children, especially as those institutions have such a powerful influence on forming ideas, determining approaches and changing convictions.

III. Prohibition and related matters

46. The direct involvement of persons under the age of 18 in combat activities, forced recruitment and the formation of armed groups are all banned under domestic law and under the Protocol, which is itself part of domestic law. In addition to the provisions of article 8 of the Child Protection Act — which have been referenced on more than one occasion in the present report — article 8/13 of the implementing regulations of that Act, promulgated by Decree of the Minister of Social Affairs No. 56386 on 16 Jumada II A.H. 1436 (5 April 2014), states that all competent departments have primary responsibility for safeguarding the life of children; for ensuring that children are raised safely and securely, away from armed conflicts, for guaranteeing that children are not involved in any form of combat operations; for safeguarding children's rights in emergency and crisis situations, wars and armed conflicts; and for taking all necessary steps to pursue and punish anyone who perpetrates war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity to the detriment of children. Article 8/14 of the implementing regulations states that competent departments must take all feasible measures to ensure that persons under the age of 18 are not directly involved in war. The article also forbids the recruitment of persons under the age of 18 into the armed forces or equivalent bodies. The Arms and Ammunition Act expressly prohibits the possession of or trade in arms of any kind or calibre. Under the Act, no one other than the competent government departments may manufacture, import, purchase, export, sell, possess, handle, procure or repair arms, ammunition, related equipment or spare parts. The Act, which covers all military-grade and individual weaponry as well as training guns, includes provision for penalties and fines against anyone attempting to smuggle weapons, parts of weapons or ammunition into the country, or who manufactures, collects, purchases, buys, possesses or modifies arms. Penalties include imprisonment for up to 20 years and fines of up to SRI 200,000 (US$ 53,000).

47. With a view to upholding international efforts to prevent the recruitment or employment of children in armed conflict by any organization or armed group, the Terrorism and Financing of Terrorism Act, issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/16 dated 24 Safar A.H. 1435 (28 December A.D. 2013), prohibits the provision of any form of support to terrorist groups. The prohibition covers collecting, donating, taking, allocating, transporting or transferring money, at home or abroad. It also prohibits the supply of any kind of arms to terrorists, or the provision of any other form of assistance through support or funding. Article 1 of the Act defines the offence of financing terrorism as follows: "Any act which constitutes an offence within the scope of and as defined in one of the treaties listed in the annex to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism."

48. Royal Order No. A/44, dated 3 Rabi' II A.H. 1435 (3 February A.D. 2014) has introduced a penalty of between 3 and 20 years' imprisonment for anyone who commits any of a number of offences. They include: participating in combat operations outside Saudi Arabia that may come under the definition contained in the preamble of the Royal Order; belonging to a terrorist group at the national, regional or international level; supporting such a group or adopting its ideas or methods in any way; expressing sympathy for such a group by any means; lending such a group material or moral support; or inciting or encouraging such support through the spoken or written word in any way. The Ministry

of the Interior is making every effort to monitor the implementation of the Arms and Ammunition Act, the Terrorism and Financing of Terrorism Act and the aforementioned Royal Order, and it seeks to detain and prosecute offenders. In fact, the Ministry has arrested a number of persons (citizens and residents) who have misled young people into joining armed groups outside Saudi Arabia. Those persons have been sent for trial. It should be pointed out that the Criminal Code of Saudi Arabia does not contemplate a statute of limitations; so criminal cases and the consequent penalties do not lapse with the passage of time.

49. Saudi Arabia acceded to the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/3 dated 22 Muharram A.H. 1422 (16 April A.D. 2001). It acceded to the Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/41 dated 3 Rajab A.H. 1407 (3 March A.D. 1987), and to the Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts, pursuant to Royal Decree No. M/26 dated 1 Jumada II A.H. 1422 (20 August A.D. 2001). Saudi Arabia does not currently intend to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Practices relating to the extradition of offenders

50. Saudi Arabia is eager to promote international and regional cooperation to combat crime and is quick to sign bilateral, regional and international extradition treaties. Such an approach, particularly towards neighbouring States, provides an example of international cooperation in the fullest sense of the term. For this reason, Saudi Arabia was quick to become a party to a number of regional extradition agreements, including the Extradition Agreement between the States of the Arab League, the Riyadh Arab Agreement on Judicial Cooperation on cross-border crime, which includes provisions relating to extradition and has been ratified by 16 States of the Arab League, and the 1998 Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, which also includes provisions relating to extradition between Arab States. Furthermore, article 38 of the Terrorism and Financing of Terrorism Act, issued on 24 Safar A.H. 1435 (28 December A.D. 2013), states as follows: "A person convicted for the offence of financing terrorism may be extradited to another State on condition that such extradition takes place in accordance with a valid treaty between Saudi Arabia and the requesting State, and on the basis of the principle of reciprocity. If the request for extradition is refused and the person concerned is tried by the competent courts in Saudi Arabia, use may be made of investigations conducted by the requesting State."

IV. Protection, recovery and reintegration

51. Although no children in Saudi Arabia are recruited as soldiers or participate in armed conflicts, the State understands the extent of suffering experienced by children who have been recruited or who participate in conflicts abroad, and it recognizes that they have a right to care, recuperation and reintegration into society. Therefore, Saudi Arabia tries to help such children by supporting the care and rehabilitation programmes run by the humanitarian and development agencies of the United Nations. This will be explained in more detail below, under the title International Aid and Cooperation.

52. In the course of Operation Decisive Storm, which was launched in response to a request from the legitimate Government of Yemen in accordance with article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Saudi armed forces have detained large numbers of Houthi militiamen and followers of deposed President Saleh. Those detained include 57 children ranging in age from 8 to 17, whom Saudi Arabia has treated in accordance with its own human rights laws, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. This includes protecting them, rehabilitating them and taking steps to prevent their further involvement in armed conflicts. The children have made statements to the legitimate authorities of Yemen in the presence of ICRC representatives in order to ensure that the criminals in the Houthi militias and the forces of deposed President Saleh who recruited them may be duly brought to trial.

Refugees

53. Saudi Arabia is constantly seeking to help refugees and displaced persons who are victims of armed conflicts throughout the world. Apart from paying for their care and rehabilitation, it also provides humanitarian aid to refugees directly or through refugee agencies and international organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), the World Bank and the Islamic Bank. Saudi Arabia does not merely pay its annual quota to those agencies and organizations but also makes extraordinary contributions in case of need to cover their budget shortfalls and enable them to carry out their programmes. Furthermore, as will be explained below, Saudi Arabia has boosted its humanitarian aid in an effort to alleviate the suffering of refugees and displaced persons who are victims of armed conflicts in occupied Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen, etc.

V. International Aid and Cooperation

54. Saudi Arabia is one of the largest donor countries in the world and its overseas aid and assistance remains a fundamental pillar of its foreign policy. The support and assistance it continues to provide to many Islamic and non-Islamic countries have benefited more than 95 developing States in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. Saudi Arabia supplies its aid bilaterally through institutions such as the Saudi Fund for Development and the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief, and multilaterally through regional bodies such as the Islamic Development Bank, AFESD, the African Development Bank (ADB) and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (ABEDA) as well as international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development (OFID), the United Nations and the World Bank.

55. The amount and regional coverage of Saudi aid has increased vastly, impelled by the needs of the receiving States. In 2014, the total amount of aid[7] rose by 230 per cent with respect to the preceding year from US$ 4.3 billion to US$ 14.5 billion (from SRI 16 billion to SRI 54 billion). In 2014, Saudi Arabia became the seventh largest humanitarian aid donor in the world, according to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report (www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/).

56. Saudi Arabia also provides support for United Nations humanitarian and development agencies. For example it is a major donor of both public and private resources to UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC, UNRWA and UNESCO. Moreover, the country provides ongoing support for the programmes those organizations run around the world. Examples of some of the substantial contributions made by Saudi Arabia in this area include the following:

- In recognition of the humanitarian role played by UNHCR, Saudi Arabia has provided annual contributions to support the agency's activities. This has included considerable financial donations during its first and subsequent conferences and large quantities of grain to help refugees in Africa, particularly in Somalia;
- With regard to Palestine refugees in particular, Saudi Arabia contributed to the establishment of UNRWA, which was created by the United Nations after Israel occupied Palestine. In recognition of the role UNRWA plays on behalf of more than 1 million Palestine refugees, Saudi Arabia makes annual contributions to its budget and has repeatedly intervened to cover the Agency's chronic budget deficit;
- Saudi Arabia supports the work of ICRC with regular contributions to its annual budget as well as extraordinary contributions amounting to some US$ 80 million;

[7] Attached is a report drafted by a committee made up of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Saudi Fund for Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Saudi Arabia.

- Strong partnerships have been formed between UNICEF and several child-related organizations in Saudi Arabia. Over recent years, those organizations have made large contributions to UNICEF, both directly and indirectly, and are increasingly engaged in developing the agency's resources for programmes and crisis intervention. The organization principally involved is the Saudi Committee for Relief in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Palestine, which is chaired by the Minister of the Interior and seeks to provide assistance to women and children who have suffered harm;
- Saudi Arabia has also provided help and assistance for international initiatives in a number of fields, most of them directed at children. For example, Saudi Arabia has donated US$ 20 million to the UNESCO Emergency Fund, supported the UNESCO dialogue programme with US$ 5 million, and launched and financed the Messengers of Peace initiative with US$ 37 million over 10 years. In addition, it provides technical support for those initiatives via the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue;
- It should be pointed out that Saudi Arabia, in line with its development plans, is continuing to promote international cooperation by providing aid and assistance to all those in need around the world.

(a) International assistance models

57. Over recent years, Saudi Arabia has provided aid and voluntary financial contributions to States suffering armed conflicts (see annex 2). This does not include periodic in-kind assistance such as the annual 4,000 tons of dates to the value of SRI 784,455.34 that are distributed to States in need and that last year went to support Syrian refugees, or the air transportation of sick persons to receive specialized treatment in Saudi Arabia. It should also be pointed out that the international assistance models given below concern only the aid provided by Saudi Arabia to States suffering armed conflicts and not the country's international aid in general, details of which are available in the eight periodic reports of Saudi Arabia on the Millennium Development Goals.

58. In view of the current situation in the Republic of Yemen, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdulaziz has taken action to regularize the situation of Yeminis residing in Saudi Arabia irregularly, providing them with visitor cards that allow them to remain for a period of six months, which may be extended, and by exempting them from all related fees and fines. He has also granted them permission to seek employment through the Ajeer system for companies and individuals, and has exempted them from all visa fees, work permit fees, medical insurance costs and penalties — such as those for infiltrating the country or for working for third parties — and from fines for violating residency and labour laws. Around 464,557 Yemenis had their status regularized and were granted visitor cards during the qualifying period. Some 379,436 males and 84,122 females were granted cards; 89,220 persons were granted visitor visas and 33,757 were granted transit visas. A total of 5,275 persons released from detention centres had their status regularized, were issued with visitor identity cards and given permission to work. A total of SRI 6.9 billion (US$ 1.8 billion) in fines owed by those whose status was regularized after having infiltrated the country was waived. A total of SRI 2.6 billion (US$ 713 million) in fines owed by those overstaying their visitor visas was likewise waived. Furthermore, a total of SRI 506 million (US$ 135 million) in fines owed by those overstaying transit visas was waived, as was SRI 79 million (US$ 21 million) in fines owed by persons released from detention.

59. In view of the current situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdulaziz has directed Saudi embassies abroad to expedite the granting of visas to Syrians who wish to visit their relatives, and to facilitate their entry into Saudi Arabia in order to reunite with their families. His Highness the Crown Prince has issued directives for the visas of Syrians who entered as visitors to be extended free of charge every three months until the current situation in their country comes to an end. In fact, a total of 2,570,972 Syrian visitors entered Saudi Arabia between 1 Muharram

A.H. 1432 and 4 Jumada I A.H. 1437 (7 December A.D. 2010 and 4 May A.D. 2016). Syrian applicants who overstayed their visas have been exempted from all relative penalties and fines, as have applicants of other nationalities. Those fines amount to SRI 15,000 (US$ 4,000) for each visitor and guest. Moreover, as an exceptional measure — as visitors to the country are not normally allowed to work — applicants for visitor visas have been incorporated into the labour market. They have also been allowed to access the health-care system and State-run hospitals free of charge and to enrol their children in State-run schools and universities, likewise free of charge.

(b) The role of civil society organizations and the private sector

60. International aid and cooperation are also linked to private sector initiatives, through which international assistance and relief can often be provided to families and children who are victims of armed conflict. Under the oversight of government authorities, the aid is gathered and provided via specially convened committees and campaigns, with the participation of individuals from civil society and the private sector. The Ministry of the Interior, as the body responsible for such campaigns, then oversees the prompt and direct delivery of donations, aid and relief to the beneficiaries, in coordination with relevant international organizations. Some examples of relief committees and humanitarian campaigns are given below.

61. With the beginning of the armed conflict in Syria, Saudi Arabian society launched a large-scale nationwide campaign under the title: the "Saudi National Campaign to Assist our Brethren in Syria". The aim of the initiative, which is still ongoing, is to gather cash and in-kind donations to help bring food, medicines, shelter and vital services to alleviate the suffering the Syrian people are experiencing as a result of the conflict in their country. One area of focus has been to meet the needs of children, widows, persons with disabilities, the sick and the elderly. The whole of Saudi society has participated in the campaign — at the level of individuals, civil society institutions and commercial enterprises — which has also sought to bring home the magnitude of the suffering in Syrian society. The total spent on the relief, social and food programmes that have been implemented in collaboration with international and regional organizations amounts to SRI 534.5 million (US$ 143 million), while a sum of SRI 108 million (US$ 28.8 million) has been earmarked for 24 projects for displaced Syrian children in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey as well as inside Syria itself (see annex 1).

62. The Saudi Committee for the Relief of the Palestinian People continues to work to relieve the suffering of Palestine refugees in the face of repeated Israeli aggression. The revenues of the Committee, which collects donations from the Saudi people, currently stand at around SRI 2 billion (US$ 533 million). This is in addition to in-kind donations such as ambulances, medical supplies and food. In 2013, the Saudi Committee for the Relief of the Palestinian People signed an agreement with UNESCO for the construction of 12 university libraries in Palestine at a cost of around SRI 10 million (US$ 2.6 million).

63. In their humanitarian endeavours, the committees and campaigns also give pride of place to education. In fact, the amount disbursed by Saudi committees and campaigns to support educational programmes stands in excess of SRI 250 million (US$ 66.6 million).

64. Mention should also be made of the creation of the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), which was set up by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States in 1981 to assist in the work of United Nations humanitarian relief organizations. Saudi Arabia has alone contributed around 78 per cent of the resources of the Programme, which aims to support efforts towards human development also by providing greater levels of care to the groups most in need in developing countries, particularly women and children. Since its foundation, AGFUND has established, backed and financed 1,365 projects in 133 States without discrimination as to colour, gender, creed or political belief.

(c) Events and conferences

65. Saudi Arabia has always used its leading position in the region, and in the Islamic world in general, to promote efforts to prevent war and achieve peace and stability in the Middle East. To that end not only does it mobilize enormous resources to alleviate the suffering experienced by refugee children and their families as a result of regional wars and armed conflicts, it also organizes events, political initiatives and global conferences that enjoy strong support and elicit positive responses on the part of the international community. Saudi Arabia also makes efforts to achieve peace and stability at a global level through dialogue and by embodying the values and principles it holds most dear: tolerance, fellowship, justice and invitation to dialogue, and the rejection of extremism, violence and armed conflict. Through a series of international conferences, Saudi Arabia has launched a global call for the countries and peoples of the world to propagate the values of dialogue and tolerance and to reject extremism and violence; they include the extraordinary session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in Mecca in December 2005; a conference on dialogue between ulemas of different schools, held in May 2008; and the World Conference on Dialogue, held in Madrid in July 2008. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia took part in a high-level meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations in October 2008 and, finally, in October 2011, it signed an agreement with Austria and Spain for the establishment of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). The Centre, which was opened in Vienna in November 2012 with funding and support from Saudi Arabia, seeks to encourage dialogue between followers of different religions and cultures, promote mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among peoples and individuals, and combat the use of religion as a justification for violence and conflict.

66. Saudi Arabia was quick to comprehend the danger that terrorism poses to the international community. Not only has it cooperated with and contributed to regional and international efforts to combat terrorism and the funding of terrorism, and acceded to a number of regional and international antiterrorism treaties, it has also hosted various international conferences on the subject including one entitled "The Position of Islam on Terrorism", held at the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in 2004. That was followed in 2005 by another international antiterrorism conference in which more than 50 Arab, Islamic and foreign States participated, along with various international, regional and Arab organizations. Saudi Arabia also called for the creation of an international antiterrorism unit and signed an agreement with the United Nations in 2011 that included provision for the creation of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. The Centre was established under General Assembly resolution 66/10 (A/RES/66/10), which encouraged Member States to collaborate with the new body. Saudi Arabia donated US$ 10 million over three years for the creation of the Centre and, in 2014, it donated a further US$ 100 million.

67. Saudi Arabia is also an active participant in regional and international conferences and has itself organized and hosted conferences, forums and workshops which have successfully created a powerful momentum for partnership between national and global efforts to help children and promote world peace. They include the following:

- A regional child-support conference was held in 2013 during which challenges, obstacles and practical plans were discussed and experiences exchanged vis-à-vis child helplines at the global level. The event involved lectures, the presentation of papers, and value proposition workshops for specialists and the general public, adults and children alike. The conference also focused on children's rights and how child helplines could promote them; the role of the public sector, civil society and communication systems in supporting child helplines; the experience of child helplines in Arab States; mechanisms for accessing children and the role young people and children could play in helplines. The conference was widely attended by local delegates as well as by representatives from the Arab States and the rest of the world;
- A workshop for law enforcement officials on the international legal framework for combating terrorism was held in Riyadh in 2009. It was organized by the Public

Investigation and Prosecution Department in Saudi Arabia in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC);

- A workshop on the international legal framework for combating terrorism was held in Riyadh in 2010. It was organized by the King Fahd Security College in collaboration with UNODC;
- An academic symposium on the role of the Internet in combating terrorism was held in 2011 at the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh. It was organized by the Ministry of the Interior in collaboration with the University, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Centre on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation;
- A seminar on combating nuclear terrorism was held in 2011, organized by the Saudi Ministry of the Interior in collaboration with the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh.

VI. Conclusion

68. This initial report has highlighted some of the efforts that have been made to implement the Optional Protocol and the goals that have been achieved in that regard. It should be made clear that the report omits certain information that Saudi Arabia had previously provided in its combined third and fourth periodic reports under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which were submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013. The most important aspects of that information have been included but the aforementioned reports should nonetheless be consulted.

69. Although Saudi Arabia enjoys political and social stability, it is well aware — in the light of its obligations under the Optional Protocol — of the enormous challenges thrown up by the agitated political situation in the region and the consequences they could have in terms of safeguarding the rights of children. Saudi Arabia reiterates its intention to continue to strive to defend the peace process and regional stability, and to provide aid and assistance to all those in need around the world, in particular the child victims of armed conflict, to the extent possible and within the framework of the country's humanitarian values and culture.

Annexes

Annex 1

Assistance programmes for displaced Syrian children run by the Saudi National Campaign to Assist our Brethren in Syria

No.	*Programme*	*State*	*Cost*[3]
1	Supplying vaccines and medicines for the winter season to internally displaced Syrian families in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO)	Inside Syria	7 901 250
2	Ensuring safe childbirth for 1,000 infants	Jordan	1 312 500
3	Enabling 3,000 Syrian students to study in the academic year 2013/14	Lebanon	7 875 500
4	Supplying 600,000 school bags	Lebanon/Jordan/Turkey	9 000 000
5	Providing gifts for Syrian children in Lebanese schools	Lebanon	1 050 500
6	Enabling 3,000 Syrian students to study in the academic year 2014/15	Lebanon	7 875 00
7	Supplying 75,000 winter coats	Inside Syria	1 687 500
8	Supplying 150,000 pairs of winter pyjamas to internally displaced Syrians	Inside Syria	2 250 500
9	Supplying 150,000 winter suits to internally displaced Syrians	Inside Syria	562 500
10	Supplying necessities for the winter of 2015	Inside Syria	10 986 355
11	Providing blankets for Syrian children in collaboration with UNICEF	Inside Syria	6 187 500
12	Supplying 75,000 winter coats	Jordan	1 687 500
13	Supplying 150,000 pairs of winter pyjamas to Syrian refugees	Jordan	2 250 500
14	Supplying 150,000 winter suits to Syrian refugees	Jordan	562 500
15	Supplying necessities for the winter of 2015	Jordan	10 986 335
16	Supplying 75,000 winter coats	Turkey	1 687 500
17	Supplying 150,000 pairs of winter pyjamas to Syrian refugees	Turkey	2 250 00
18	Supplying 150,000 winter suits to Syrian refugees	Turkey	562 500
19	Supplying necessities for the winter of 2015	Turkey	10 986 355
20	Supplying 75,000 winter coats	Lebanon	1 687 500
21	Supplying 150,000 pairs of winter pyjamas to Syrian refugees	Lebanon	2 250 000
22	Supplying 150,000 winter suits to Syrian refugees	Lebanon	562 500
23	Supplying necessities for the winter of 2015	Lebanon	10 986 335
24	Providing 30,000 aid hampers to Syrian children	Lebanon/Jordan/Turkey	4 930 000

[3] SRIs.

Annex 2

Aid and contributions given by Saudi Arabia to other States

- US$ 60 million went to cover the budget shortfall of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in addition to the regular annual contribution to the Agency of US$ 1.2 million;
- US$ 34 million went to UNRWA as part of an overall donation by Saudi Arabia to Palestinians of US$ 300 million;
- US$ 1 billon went for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip;
- In 2014, US$ 26.6 million was given to the Palestinian Ministry of Health to address the problem of the lack of medicines and emergency medical supplies for the treatment of persons injured in Israeli attacks against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip;
- In 2014, US$ 53.3 million was given to the Palestine Red Crescent Society to provide medical aid and ambulances for thousands of innocent Palestinians injured in attacks in the Gaza Strip, most of them women and children;
- In 2012, US$ 266.6 million was donated by the Al Aqsa Fund and the Al Quds Fund for reconstruction in Gaza, various other projects, support for the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and emergency assistance programmes for the health-care system in Gaza;
- In 2013, US$ 100 million went to providing in-kind assistance to the Syrian coalition;
- In 2013, US$ 133.3 million went to providing blankets, rugs and tents for displaced Syrians in Jordan;
- In 2013, US$ 9.8 million was used to acquire 8,500 tents, which were delivered by the Saudi National Campaign to Assist our Brethren in Syria;
- In 2013, US$ 80 million went to supporting Syria refugees; of that amount US$ 10 million went to UNRWA for Palestine refugees who had been affected by the Syrian crisis in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, while US$ 2 million went to the donors' trust fund for Syria;
- In 2013, US$ 10 million was used for emergency aid and relief in the Sudan;
- In 2013, US$ 5 million was used to support the health-care sector in Somalia;
- In 2014, US$ 500 million was donated by Saudi Arabia as non-refundable aid to Iraqis who had suffered harm as a result of armed conflict, including displaced persons; the aid was provided via the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations to ensure that it was not used for political rather than humanitarian purposes, and Saudi Arabia monitored the process in order to ensure that the aid reached Iraqis of all categories, irrespective of their religious, sectarian or ethnic affiliations;
- US$ 5.9 billion was given to Yemen in 2012;
- In 2014, US$ 21.6 million was donated to Yemen for the refurbishment of Aden public hospital and the construction of a cardiac clinic; it was also spent on the second Ma'rib gas-fired power plant, public works, a rural roads project and an alternative energy project;
- US$ 746 million was given to Lebanon following the war with Israel, a sum which represented 63 per cent of the total amount of aid given to Lebanon by donor countries;
- In 2009, US$ 6.4 million went to support the construction of an emergency centre for children and a burns unit in the Kenyatta National Hospital;

- In 2012, US$ 50 million was given to aid Muslims in Myanmar who had been subjected to human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing, killings, rape and forced displacement;
- In 2012, US$ 4.3 million was donated to the Sudan to help address the humanitarian situation in Darfur and to build vocational training centres in Kadugli and El Damazin;
- In 2012, US$ 39.4 million was donated to Pakistan to help in reconstruction work in areas damaged by the earthquake and to fund Saudi humanitarian initiatives for persons displaced or otherwise affected by conflicts or flooding;
- SRI 93.7 million has been given as the Saudi contribution to the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND).